BEGINNING
WITH
PHOTOGRAPHY

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When reflecting about photographs that I consider good ones out of my instinct, I find out that all of these pictures have in various extent the following four properties:

* They captivate our interest

* They have a visible purpose and meaning

* They make emotion-like impression
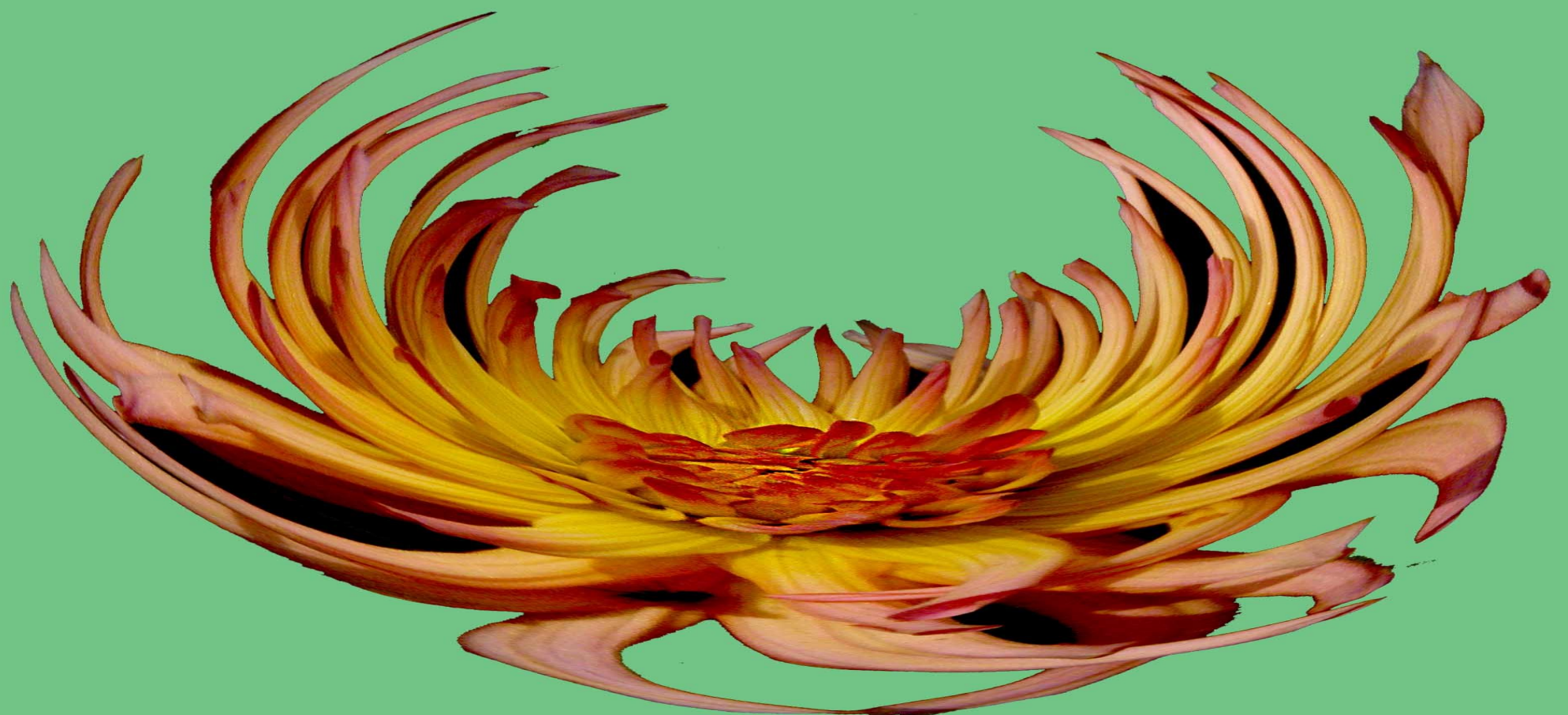
* They function on the graphical level

Andreas Feinger

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The Contents:

We all transform reality into a certain photographic image in our own way. In order to take distinctive and appealing photographs which could please our family, friends and to be able to present them proudly on the Internet, such photographs need to be interesting, attractive and has to have a spark. We can reach this with setting up the right exposition and adhering to particular composition rules.

This book provides an insight into fundamentals of composition. If we add frequent photographing and creative thoughts to such knowledge, this sort of cocktail becomes a guarantee of perfect creative photographs. At the beginning we need to carefully think over every image even before shooting and later all rules get under our skin. We gain the photographic instinct and seeing ability and our pictures are able to surprise and enchant others. Afterwards, we may let our imagination run riot and tune in to a creative mode.
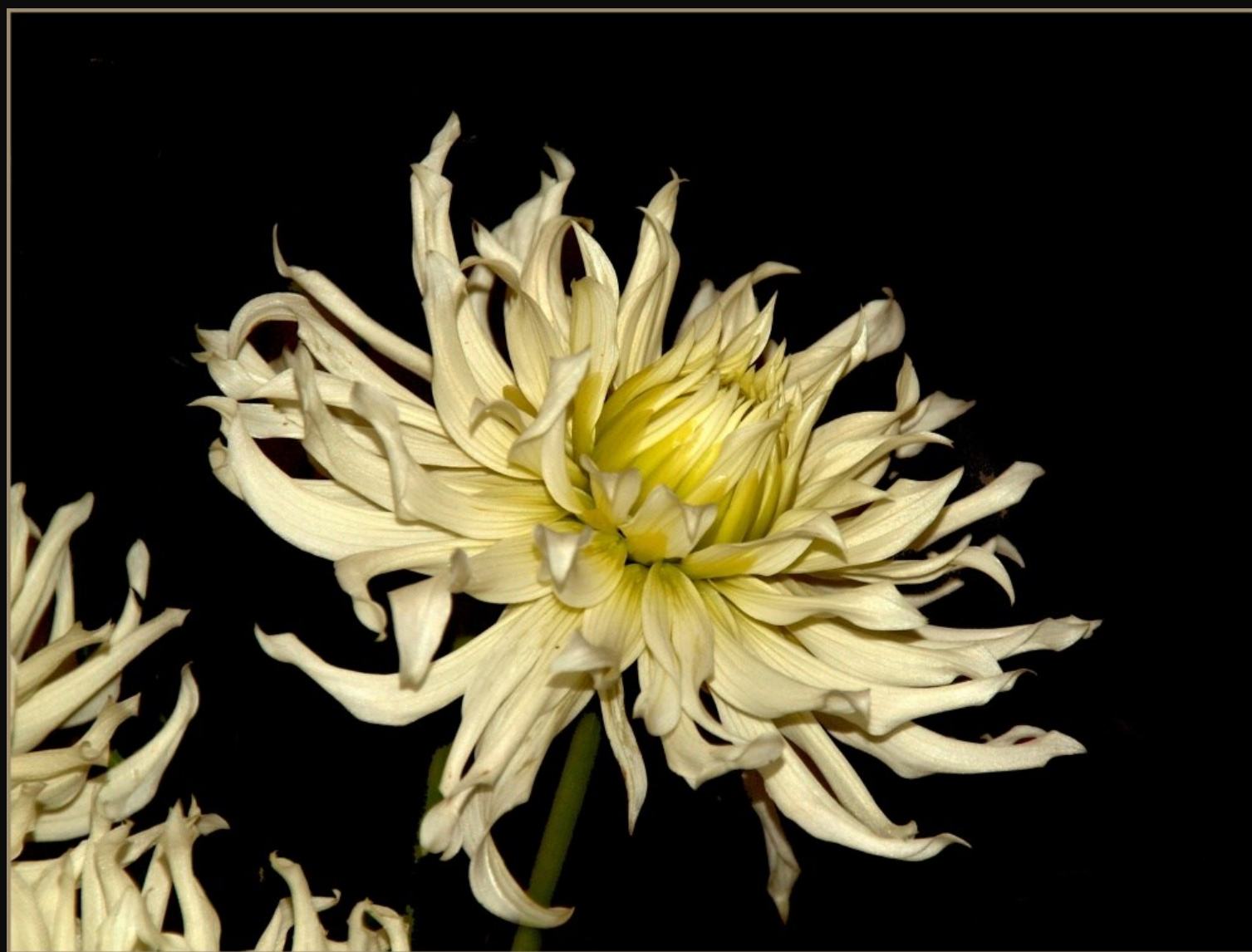
1 SELECTION OF THE MOTIF

Selection of the motif is the first and the most important step in taking a photograph. We either know in advance what we are going to photograph or we try improvising. A motif of a picture can be either the whole village or a sole petal, for instance. Sometimes it is enough to trigger the shutter release button at the right moment and you take the cutting edge photo and next time the right picture needs longer decision-making process.

The motif selected should be attractive (meaning photogenic) and simple in order to set up the pictorial scene properly and it should be disclosed. The photographer always perceives the theme subjectively and in this way he/she proposes a different perspective to the viewer than what the viewer can see.

The theme itself constantly changes. Landscape is influenced by lighting, weather but also relationship of the photographer to a certain theme. A photographer may be inspired by sea or rocks, for example; when he is inspired by something, he fills the image with his mood and all that influences the final implementation of the photograph. The resulting image should always depict the photographer's personality.

When selecting the motif, we should already take into account its:

⇒ **Photogenic** factors (meaning the optical harmony), attractive and interesting shapes, arrangement of elements, variety of colours, tonality as well as content.

⇒ **Simplicity** since beauty lies in simplicity. Fewer elements are sufficient but they should be somehow striking. In this way they convey a message more clearly and efficiently and the viewers have better understanding of it. If we aspire to present beauty, we don't need to have the whole garden in the picture. The content is diluted in a complicated image on account of which the picture is more chaotic.

⇒ **Content** - may it be a story, beauty, a gesture, originality, a shape or abstraction.

Seeking the spell in the theme that could attract others is a creative part of photographing. In order to find such spell that attracts viewers, the objects in the pictorial scene are captured in a suitable manner and arranged on the pictorial area to highlight its content.

When we go for a walk in the nature with the camera in hand, we perceive it in a very different way than without the camera in hand. We tend to select a motif that could be attractive and appealing for us and we look for a picture with balanced composition and particularly with an interesting dominant factor. We also take notice of all those details we otherwise just pass unnoticed. In this way photographic perception enriches us since we are able to perceive the nature and the life around us more sensitively.

If the same motif is portrayed by two people, the outcome might be very different. By means of our photographs we propose our own expression, feelings, imagination, experience as well as view of the world to others. Therefore, we select the motifs that we communicate to others and every now and then we can get back to them out of love, nostalgia or just as a recall of a situation.

⇧ *The Green hill church has been already photographed countless times - I reckon that this tender and dream-like version is the first one.*

1.1 Photogenic Factors

Photogenic factors are grouped elements, areas and lines that make an impression on the viewer's aesthetic perception when combined with light, colour and composition of the photograph taken.

We choose photogenic (meaning attractive) motifs for photographing. This does not mean tacky motifs but strong colours or themes that could be appealing for everyone. A photogenic image is awaiting its viewers and thus it should have more profound meaning.

We primarily relate photogenic factors to a portrait. Although some faces are beautiful from the first point of view, such beauty cannot be utilized. On the other hand, an ordinary face can all of the sudden come live with an extraordinary expression. The face seems to be photogenic which means that we perceive its nice shape, colour as well as aesthetic or artistic properties. Sometimes just coincidence, lighting or a gesture may help. Another essential factor is how we manage to cope with the face or another motif, capture just its characteristic properties and highlight it from more interesting perspective.

Actually any pictorial element may be photogenic - may it be a tree, an animal, a bridge, or a straw bale. There might be an interesting tree but after trigger the shutter release button we may be disappointed. The reality is different than what's captured with a camera. We gradually learn seeing in similar way as our camera and get photographic instinct. We are able to perceive photogenic shapes, light, shadows as well as tonality contrast that together create a balanced scene.

A photogenic face is only one part of a good snapshot. It needs to be made special with something extra. We focus the portrait on eyes that should be located in the upper third of the pictorial area. If the person in the portrait wears a hat or other headgear, it has to be either in the whole, reduced with a cut out, it cannot touch the picture frame or it can be darkened by the frame via, for instance, vignetting in a photo editor.

1.2 Simplicity of the Photographic Image

Simplicity does not mean dullness. A simple image is acceptable but it has to have strong content. The simpler the image is, the richer its content should be. A simpler image is easier for compounding; we can more easily highlight the main idea in it. The viewer can more easily understand it and its content and is able to add visual shapes, plot or other content beyond the picture itself.

An interesting and simple shape of an inanimate object (a building) is in contrast with a life tree. An inclined wall indicates space but also direction. In the lower part the building is docked with a fixed wall.

1.3. Content of the Photograph

Content of the photograph should be simple but with a complex "structure". Viewers should have a chance to recognize something in the pictorial scene, imagine something or be surprised from something.

We should be able to offer only the content of the message and deplete the photographic image from everything redundant which is not part of the intended content. We should realize only the important aspects and define them for ourselves.

Utilize an idea, style and aesthetic input in the image that provides appealing content. We may use it even before triggering the shutter release button or just in the photo editor. The idea makes the image alive and gives it a spark. When taking creative photographs, we can modulate tonality, colour, a cut-out, incorrect **white balance** setting, we can lighten, blur or do anything that highlights our idea, makes the image sexy or adds something extra to the image and particularly to the content. The image remains too casual without any creative idea.

We should interpret the content of the image in a suitable manner that forms the artistic layout of the image, its outlook and the way we present the image to the viewer. Form should promote the content and be in harmony with the content since these two elements are "two sides of the same coin". Dark tonality promotes bleakness, contrast evokes tension and light colours can shift even to the dream-like image expression.

> *"When I was young with little money, I built a summer cottage according to the design of my wife and her father. I built it with my own hands. After building the cottage, I took a series of photographs. Since the cottage was unique from the architectonic perspective, several international architectonic magazines printed my photographs. I paid the whole cottage from the money I got. At that time I realized that quality is worth it."*
>
> *Peter Nagel*

PHOTO TIPS

When we take the camera and look into the viewfinder or on the display, we do the following activities:

- **Select a motif** that made an impression on us and we intend to depict it

- **Select a dominant factor of the image**, meaning the principal motif (i.e. an element) which is the reason to take the picture

- **Select other elements** for the pictorial scene which serve as follow-ups to the principal motif

- **Select the photographing spot and the angle of view** from which we either promote or supress the spatial impression and change arrangement of the elements in the scene

- **Create composition of the pictorial scene,** meaning the arrangement of the elements in it

- **Arrange balance of the pictorial elements -** both figurative and non-figurative ones

- **Select a form of the image** by means of which we promote the content

- **Apply a certain idea** and add a surprising element either in selection of the theme or during processing in the computer

We should not photograph interesting themes in a casual way but should be able to capture a casual theme in an extraordinary fashion.

"The first 10 000 pictures are the worst ones."

Henri Cartier-Breson

Sharp summer sun illuminated only the faces, the rest remained hidden. The male face is closer, focused. Even thought the female face is slightly blurred, it attracts more attention because it is lighter. They both are interconnected thanks to their closeness but also their interest in something.

2 PICTORIAL ELEMENTS

For photographs we select only those elements that create the content, draw viewers' attention and add to the image proper tension. This means that each element must be functional and must play a certain role. One role the element plays may be significant, other auxiliary or just indicative. We must avoid extraneous elements that scatter or change the content.

Some elements are close and linked to each other and in this way they influence each other. Depending on importance of the role they play, we need to organise them in the picture which means to select a suitable composition.

One of the principal photographer's tasks is to determine the role of the pictorial element. We choose for the image only such elements that are supposed to play a certain role, bear the content as well as are mutually interconnected. They may be in line with each other or on the other hand contrasting to each other. We locate elements in the image in a way that they are well-balanced. Selection of the right photographing spot and the right angle of view helps us to achieve that. It is also essential what other elements we include in the image or how big the background and foreground is. If a horse herd runs surrounded by several foals in the background and we point out in the pictorial area only one horse and one foal, the pictorial scene of the image is very different than in reality.

> *"The photographer PENN took atelier pictures of cigarette butts in a way that they are expensive jewellery and had them made into big platinum prints. In reality it was half of his success and the second half - meaning the gloss and interest of the viewer - was made thanks to his name."*

2.1 General Classification of the Pictorial Elements

Every element plays a different role in the picture. When we view any picture, we can find various specific objects, characters, animals, plants, buildings, things as well as colours, various geometric shapes, lines or dark and light spots in it.

The elements we choose should become bearing elements of the pictorial scene. These elements are supposed to convey a message, should be distinct, able to be composited and balanced.

When looking into the viewfinder of the camera, we should learn to perceive two groups of such elements.

Figurative elements - real objects

Non-figurative elements - colours, lines, tonality, brightness, blurriness, light and shadow, contrast or rhythm.

A blossom is a figurative element in this image; tonal contrast is the non-figurative one. The light blossom may be highlighted thanks to different and very mild tonality but it is not exaggerated at its detriment.